

Joseph Kraft

The Politics

Behind the daily, unceasing ration of horror stories about the Central Intelligence Agency there is working a many-sided politics of assassination. The upshot is confusion about what happened, innuendo damaging to persons both living and dead, and delay in the reform of the agency.

The wrongs already done can probably not be righted. But at least it seems useful to describe the process that keeps the issue dragging on and on and on.

The starting point is the undoubted fact that officials of the CIA worked in deliberate fashion over long periods of time to promote the assassination of some foreign leaders. William Colby, the director of the CIA, has handled this embarrassing matter in the curious, semi-candid fashion that has marked his whole approach to wrongdoing by the agency.

He made known the assassination projects—first to President Ford, then to the Rockefeller Commission looking into domestic activities by the CIA. Once the information became public, he and other CIA officials tried to save the honor of the agency by laying the blame for what had been done on other, higher officials.

Leading Republican figures joined the game. President Ford himself leaked the fact of the assassination plots to the New York Times, and then focused more attention on the issue by formally assigning it to the Rockefeller Commission.

Vice President Rockefeller gratuitously suggested on national television that President John Kennedy and Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy knew about CIA efforts to get Fidel Castro. Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania, a leading Republican member of the Senate committee investigating the CIA, then suggested, also on national television, that the assassination of President Kennedy might have been an act of revenge for the conspiracies against Castro's life.

Democrats have made riposte to that thrust in two ways. First they are implying strongly that in many assassination efforts the CIA was acting on its own and not in response to direction from above. In that vein, much to the

of Assassination Post 8/3/76



By MacNelly for the Richmond News Leader

displeasure of some members, Sen. Frank Church, the chairman of the Senate committee, declared that the CIA had behaved like a "rogue elephant."

Secondly, the committee is including, under the rubric of a general investigation into assassinations, a look at several plots undertaken in 1970 against Salvador Allende, then President elect of Chile. Dr. Allende, a Marxist, was himself killed in a military coup in 1973. The 1970 plots against him resulted in the accidental killing of Gen. Rene Schneider, then chief of the staff of the Chilean Army.

Leaks from the committee purport to show that the 1970 plots had CIA support. The leaks further suggest that President Nixon, in a burst of frustration, personally ordered CIA participation in those plots.

The implication of some of the leaks is that the Secretary of State, former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell, and former CIA Director Richard Helms were privy to the President's order. It is flatly implied that Mr. Helms, who is now ambassador to Iran, committed perjury in denying knowledge of the attempts to undo Allende to a Senate committee. It is hinted that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger also committed perjury.

Much of the reporting, especially by those humble seekers after truth in the networks, suggests that the full story can finally be known if only the probe goes deeper—if President Nixon talks, or Dr. Kissinger, or Mr. Mitchell. Hence there is a well-established rationale for continued investigating and continued leaking.

My own impression, and that of

some acute members of the Senate committee, is that the investigation can only yield a murky picture. The CIA apparently undertook some horrors on its own bat, and some orders. For the rest there was an unclear line of command, an ambiguous accountability.

Which only underlines the need to reorganize the intelligence community and to make changes at the top in order to prevent further abuses. It is sad that the Senate committee has allowed itself to be drawn from its original mandate by the diversion of assassination politics. It is time that President Ford, who bears no small responsibility for having created the diversion, stepped in to give shape and direction to the inquiry.

© 1975, Field Enterprises, Inc.